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HEALTH FRONTIERS SCIENCE

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Old diseases learn new tricks, not phased by treatment

By Katherine Arnold The Battalion

The recent outbreak of the plague in India has raised questions about the possibility of recurrences in the

United States. There are as many as 400 suspected cases of pneumonic plague in India. However, several of these are actually sicknesses such as tuberculosis and pneumonia.

Dr. David McMurray, a professor of medical microbiology and immunology at Texas A&M, has been conducting research on tuberculosis, which once plagued the United States.

At the turn of the century, tuberculosis was the number one killer of humans. Improvements in living standards and the advent of antibiotics helped to control the disease, McMurray said.

According to the National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases, eight million people contract tuberculosis and three million people die from it. In 1992, there were over 26,000 active cases of tuberculosis in the United States.

"So far we have discovered that the nutritional habits of the patient makes a difference," McMurray said. "We have also tested vaccines that consist of genetically engineered re-combinant DNA."

Tuberculosis is a disease that targets the lungs. Patients suffer from a cough, fever, troubled breathing, and weight loss. Patients can be totally cured with antibiotics if the disease is caught early enough.

Janet Matthews, who works with the tuberculosis control program at the Bra-zos County Health Department, said a person can contract the virus from a patient in which the virus is active.

"A person may be exposed to the virus from an active-state patient, but the virus remains inactive for a long time," Matthews said. "Within a year or two, when the defense systems finally break down, the person comes down with active tuberculosis.

The Brazos County Health Department created the tuberculosis control program because Texas is among the top six states with the highest rate of tuberculosis. The program attempts to increase awareness about tuberculosis symptoms.

Despite improved living conditions in the United States, Matthews said tuberculosis is resurging once again.

She said an increased number of HIV-infected individuals has caused tuberculosis to remain active, because the immune system of an HIV-infected person is more susceptible to infection.

Also, an increased number of immigrants from countries with high rates of tuberculosis accounts for cases still existing in the United States, she said. These countries include Mexico, Vietnam and some Asian countries.

Matthews said pockets of tuberculo-sis exist in the United States among certain areas of the general population, such as the homeless and the undernourished. Interaction with such groups can cause the disease to spread.

Researchers are still working to combat the disease. But doctors face new problems.

"We are seeing the appearance of resistance from the virus," McMurray said. "The old treatments aren't working anymore.

The virus develops an immunity to certain drugs, and those drugs are inef"This is a fairly new development,"

fective in treating tuberculosis, Mc-Murray said. "We've not seen this that there have been no case berculosis in the Brazos Valle The Health Department reported the past year.

Newest antibiotics rendered useless again a pla before treatable but now resistant virus

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — Germs resistant to antibiotics are spreading at an alarming rate in hospitals, and doc-tors fear pneumonia, blood infections and other ills will become impervious to anything medicine can now throw at them

If this happens, routine ailments can become killers, especially among those whose bodies are already weakened by disease

Nowhere is this problem more urgent than in hospitals, where the spread of infections has always been a big problem. About 85 percent of the types of bacteria responsible for hospital-acquired infections have gradually developed resis-tance to common antibiotics, said Dr. Martin Favero of the

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta. A study outlined Friday shows just how dramatically

A study outlined Friday shows just how dramatically these medicines are losing their punch. Among the most worrisome problems is the emergence of common intesti-nal microbes called enterococci that are resistant to van-comycin, the main drug used against them. Dr. Ronald N. Jones and others from the University of Iowa collected samples from 43 hospitals across the Unit-

ed States. They found that about 16 percent of enterococci ed States. They found that about to percent of enterocecer can withstand vancomycin, and about half of these are also resistant to all the other primary antibiotics used against them — and even some drugs that have not been released yet for routine treatment. Enterococci can cause life-threatening bloodstream and

heart infections.

Of even more concern is the possibility that enterococci might pass their resistance on to other nasty microbes. such as staph bacteria, that doctors now stop with vancomycin.

"This is a really terrifying potential," Jones said The survey also showed that 18 percent of preum bacteria, which cause pneumonia, are resistant to cillin. Two-thirds of one variety of staphylococcus were resistant to ciprofloxacin, another common and Jones presented his findings at an infectious disa

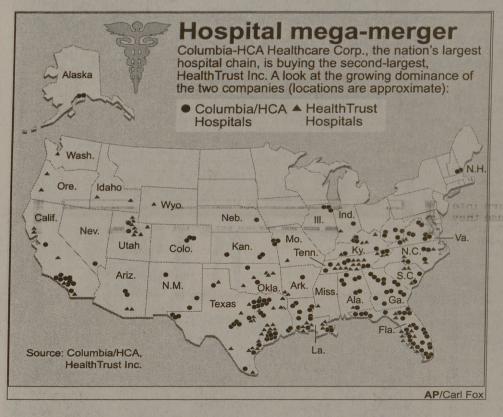
ference sponsored by the American Society of Micro Antibiotic resistance is almost as old as the an era, which began in the early 1940s with the disor penicillin. Within a few years, doctors witnessed to

penicillin. Within a few years, doctors witnessed lution of microbes that were impervious to the medi Microbes acquire genes that shield them from the This happens either through random genetic mutation picking up a resistance gene from another strain of back Over time, the resistant bacteria become domine their susceptible kin are killed off by antibiotics.

Overuse of these powerful drugs is often blaned sistance. Critics complain of a "B-52 approach" some doctors who blitz their patients with aba broad-based antibiotics, often when they are un

actly what is making them sick. In hospitals, poor hygiene also appears to play and doctors and nurses are likely to be the carrier, they fail to wash their hands between each patient ter using the toilet.

"I've seen nurses disconnect tubing with the hands and reconnect them with subsequent in said Dr. Robert Weinstein of Michael Reese Ho Chicago. He said patients should demand that workers wash up before seeing them.



HEALTH TIPS Health Fair to help students fair healthin

By Amy Clark A.P. Beutel Health Center

Do you know your cholesterol level? Have you had your blood pressure checked? What is your blood type, stress level or body composition? Have you been screened for glaucoma? Do you have questions about your health? Want to find out more about what is available on campus and in the community? Do you want to know more about health - physical, mental, social and spiritual?

If so, come to the Health Fair! On Wed, Oct. 12, A.P. Beutel Health Center at Texas A&M University will present "Discover Health," the 1994 Health and Wellness Fair. Literature, free screenings, entertainment and great prizes will be available. The Health Fair will be held from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. in the main walkway and Flagroom of the MSC on campus.

The fair's goal is to promote physical, mental, social and spiritual health. The campus and community organizations will provide information on health issues to students, faculty, staff and the surrounding community that can help raise awareness and generate interest in healthy lifestyles. The information and services offered at the fair will benefit all who attend.

A variety of campus and community organizations will be represented at the fair. Some highlights include blood pressure screenings, glucose screenings, vision and glaucoma screenings,

biofeedback and stress tests. Over 40 campus and om organizations will be represented at the fair, including •Aerofit Health and Fitness Center

- · Aggies for Life
- ·Aggie R.E.A.C.H.
- American Red Cross Blood Services • A.P. Beutel Health Center
- ·Brazos Animal Shelter
- BVCAA Family Health Services
- Brazos County Rape Crisis Center
 Brazos Valley Crisis Pregnancy Services
- Eta Sigma Gamma • Fitlife
- •Health Promotion Program
- March of Dimes
- •Mental Health/Mental Retardation
- Phoebe's Home
- Planned Parenthood of Brazos
- Texas A&M CDPE, The Rainbow Center
- Texas A&M College of Medicine Texas A&M Emergency Medical Services
- Texas A&M Vegetarian Society
- Texas Department of Public Safety
- University Police Department
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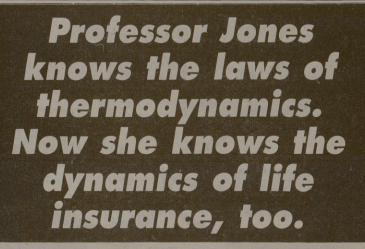
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The Battalion (USPS 045-360) is published daily, Monday through Friday during the fall and semesters and Monday through Thursday during the summer sessions (except University he exam periods), at Texas A&M University. Second class postage paid at College Station, TX POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Battalion, 230 Reed McDonald Building. A&M University, College Station, TX 77843.

News: The Battalion news department is managed by students at Texas A&M University Division of Student Publication, a unit of the Department of Journalism. Editorial offices 013 Reed McDonald Building. E-mail: BATT@TAMVM1.TAMU.EDU. Newsroom phone # 845-3313. Fax: 845-2647.

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